Nature Notes



News and Events from the Missouri Department of Conservation • January/February/March 2014

Winter Birds

Enjoying nature's beauty

ature is wondrous in every season, but the harshness of winter affords special opportunities to view wildlife, especially birds, up close. Winter bird feeding is a very rewarding winter nature activity. There are some basics to successful winter bird feeding to keep in mind, though.

In order to provide food for the greatest diversity of birds you will need to use a variety of feeders. Some birds, such as juncos, sparrows and doves, are ground feeders. Seed placed directly on the ground can get moldy when wet, so it is best to use a tray feeder with a sturdy screen bottom to hold seed a couple of inches off the ground. You can add a cover to keep seed dry during wet weather. Placing the feeder at least 10 feet from the nearest shrub gives birds a chance to escape from predators like cats and hawks.

Downy woodpecker



Other birds prefer hanging feeders. The most common hanging feeders are tube, thistle and suet feeders. Squirrels can be a nuisance with these feeders. To cut down on seed stealing, hang the feeder at least 5 feet off the ground and at least 6 feet from shrubs, trees and buildings. Squirrel baffles can also help protect your bird seed.

Tube feeders that hold bird seed mixes, sunflower seeds and shelled peanuts are best for attracting the widest variety of birds. Thistle feeders hold thistle or black nyjer seed which attracts finches and pine siskins. Suet, or fat, is high in calories and therefore an important winter food source. Suet feeders attract woodpeckers, wrens, bluebirds and nuthatches. Use at least one large feeder that holds a lot of seed and place the feeders at varying heights to suit a variety of birds.

Remember that bird feeders should be cleaned periodically to prevent the spread of disease. Use a 10% bleach solution at least twice a year or more often if the seed gets moldy.

In addition to food, cover and water are important in winter bird feeding. Providing cover offers protection from adverse weather and predators. Blocking the path of prevailing winds with evergreen vegetation will protect birds while they feed and keep seed dry. Bird bath heaters can be purchased to provide an unfrozen source of water. Many birds will drink and even bathe with no ill effects in unfrozen water this time of year.

Providing a combination of bird feeders, different types of food, cover, and unfrozen water will ensure a front row seat to great winter bird watching. You can also participate in a citizen science project, The Great Backyard Bird Count, by counting birds at your feeders or anywhere you'd like. This annual four day event provides valuable data on where the birds are and their numbers. This year's count takes place February 14-17, 2014. Anyone can participate, but children especially enjoy counting birds and submitting their data!



If you don't want the expense or work of maintaining bird feeders, or if you would like to see species that don't visit feeders, the Department's Conservation Areas are great places to watch birds this winter. A good place to look for winter birds is around cedar thickets, woodlands, and field edges.

Another bird that is a must-see in the winter is the bald eagle. Missouri is one of the leading bald eagle winter viewing states due to the amount of open water around our rivers and lakes. Over 2,500 eagles have been recorded here during winter in recent years. Bald eagles begin arriving in the fall but peak migration to Missouri occurs in December.

The Department provides Eagle Days programs at six locations around the state from December through February. Eagle Days events include live eagle programs, exhibits, activities and guides with spotting scopes. Clarksville Lock and Dam 24 and the Apple Shed Theatre will host northeast Missouri's Eagle Days on January 25 and 26, 2014. Come out and join us!

—Krista Noel Natural History Biologist

Northeast Regional Office and Interpretive Center

3500 S. Baltimore, Kirksville, MO 63501 • mdc.mo.gov/node/279



The Northeast Regional Office and Interpretive Center is located just south of Kirksville on Hwy 63. Come inside to enjoy exhibits, attend programs, purchase permits, and pick up free conservation brochures. Head outside to walk the habitat trail or fish in the stocked pond.

HOURS

Building: Monday-Friday, 8 AM-5 PM Trail and Pond: Daily, 4 AM-10 PM

TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM

Programs are free. Call 660-785-2420 to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

January Events Knee High Naturalists The Wild Side

January 6 • Monday • 10:30–11:30 AM *No registration required (ages 3-6)* What exactly does "wild" mean? Wild animals have different needs and





The bald eagle, our national symbol

behavior than tame animals. Discover the differences between wild and tame and learn about safely interacting with wild animals at this program.

Creature Feature Wild Vs. Tame

January 8 • Wednesday 3:30–4:30 PM

No registration required (ages 7-12) Would you want a coyote living in your house? Why not? A wild animal and a tame animal have very different needs and behavior. Learn about some of those differences and how to react to wildlife with us.

Conservation Keepers Birding Basics

January 18 • Saturday • 1–2 PM No registration required (all ages)
Birding is one of the most popular outdoor activities in Missouri. Join us to get the most out of your binoculars, learn what to look for when viewing birds and practice identifying some Missouri birds!

Creature Feature Big, Bold, Bald

January 22 • Wednesday 3:30–4:30 PM

No registration required (ages 7-12)
The bald eagle is the largest bird of prey in Missouri. Our population of bald eagles expands from a few hundred to a few thousand each winter, which makes it the best time to spot one of these magnificent birds! Let's see what we can discover about bald eagles.

Clarksville Eagle Days

January 25-26 • Saturday, 9 AM–4PM Sunday, 10:00–3:00 PM No registration required (all ages) Visit Clarksville for winter viewing of bald eagles on the Mississippi River! Spotting scopes are available on the river and live eagle displays will take place throughout the event. There will also be activities for kids, so bring the whole family. Don't forget to dress for the weather!

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Woodchuck, groundhog and marmot are all names for this Missouri mammal

February Events

Knee High Naturalists Woodchuck Weather

February 3 • Monday 10:30-11:30 AM

No registration required (ages 3-6) Woodchucks, also known as groundhogs or marmots, are said to be able to predict the changing weather. Although the predictions are frequently wrong, the woodchuck does wake up from its winter nap as the weather changes. Join us to learn more about this wild weatherman!

Conservation Keepers Great Backyard Bird Count

February 15 • Saturday • 1-2 PM No registration required (all ages) Put last month's birdwatching skills to the test as we take part in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. We will do one count at the bird feeders and another near the pond, so remember to dress for the weather!

Creature Feature Woodchuck Weather

February 26 • Wednesday 3:30-4:30 PM *No registration required (ages 7-12)* Woodchucks, also known as

groundhogs or marmots, are said to be able to predict the changing weather. Although the predictions are frequently wrong, the woodchuck does wake up from its winter nap as the weather changes. Join us to learn more about this wild weatherman!

March Events

Knee High Naturalists One Little Acorn

March 3 • Monday 10:30-11:30 AM

No registration required (ages 3-6) What is an acorn for? Follow the story of one little acorn as it grows from a small seed into a towering oak tree. We'll take a look at some real oak trees and make a craft from some parts of the tree.

Creature Feature Nuts for Trees!

March 12 • Wednesday 3:30-4:30 PM

No registration required (ages 7-12) Many of Missouri's trees start out as a simple nut. Majestic oaks grow from a single acorn and black walnuts and hickories are common throughout the state. What role do these trees play in our habitats?

Conservation Keepers Meet A Tree

March 15 • Saturday • 1–2 PM *No registration required (all ages)* Leaves simplify identification, but even bare trees can be named with a bit of practice. Get some ID practice when you meet a tree on the trail.

Knee High Naturalists Spring Greening

March 17 • Monday 10:30-11:30 AM

No registration required (ages 3-6) The seasons are changing from winter to spring, and nature responds to the warmer weather with a display of green. Take a walk to look for some signs of spring on the habitat trail.

Evening With Wildlife

March 25 • Tuesday 6:00-9:00 PM

No registration required (all ages) Join us at Macon High School for the Northeast Region's annual Evening With Wildlife. Live animals, pelts, demonstrations, and quest speakers will be part of this evening of conservation exploration.

Creature Feature Reptiles Rock

March 26 • Wednesday 3:30-4:30 PM

No registration required (ages 7-12) From the quick lizard hiding under a rock to the turtle basking on a log, reptiles captivate us. Meet some live reptiles and discover what makes them unique at this program.



Hunter Education

mdc.mo.gov/node/3722



These free courses are required for anyone born on or after January 1, 1967, who wants to hunt with firearms in Missouri. Hunters under 15 years of age who will be hunting with a properly permitted hunter age 18 or over, hunters that are 16 or older and have an Apprentice Hunter Authorization, or landowners or lessees hunting on land that they own or reside upon are exempted from the hunter education requirement. Anyone age 11 or older may take the hunter education course and become certified.

There are two parts of the hunter education requirements, knowledge and skills. The knowledge portion can be completed through one of three options. An online course is available, as well as a self-study guide and a classroom session. Once the knowledge portion is completed, hunters must attend and pass a 4-hour skills session to become hunter education certified. Registration for classes is available online.

If you have any questions about hunter education, please contact Outdoor Skills Specialist Rob Garver by calling 660-785-2420.

Educator's Corner

mdc.mo.gov/node/92

Make a difference: Help others discover nature

Tradition mandates that we make resolutions for the New Year, but no one really holds our feet to the fire on following through. Over the years, my resolution have run the gamut from losing 10 pounds to saving more money to running a half marathon to my wacky determination to like pickled beets. This year I have become more serious about my decision. I resolve to make my resolution a life change.

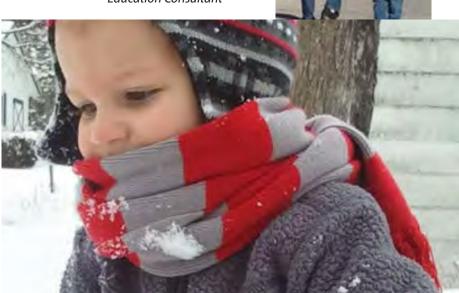
I want to provide positive experiences concerning nature in the lives of my grandchildren. Fortunately for me the youngsters already like the outdoors, even in winter. I think my grandson's first words were "outside? outside?"

Missouri and its seasons provide an abundance of outdoor opportunities like canoeing, caving, hiking, fishing or viewing bald eagles. It could be as simple as watching a butterfly slowly opening and closing its wings on the head of a purple coneflower or an inchworm measuring the length of a leaf.

I hope to instill in them a sense of wonder about nature and an understanding of how all things are connected. I love the look on their sweet faces when I help them discover nature.

What will your resolution be? I choose to make a difference for the future.

-Karen Armstrong Education Consultant



Fun and Free

Stop by the MDC Northeast Regional Office in Kirksville during office hours to check out a Discover Nature backpack. These backpacks give you a self-guided tour of the natural world as you walk the habitat trail.

Backpacks can be checked out at the front desk. Each backpack is loaded with tools and information to enhance your experience, from magnifiers and measuring tapes to field guides and a nature journal.



Northeast Nature Notes is available by mail, e-mail, and on the MDC website.

To be added to the mail or e-mail registry, or to switch from one to the other, please contact Amanda Moore at amanda.moore@mdc.mo.gov or call 660-785-2420.

The online version of the newsletter is available at mdc.mo.gov/node/17875.

A full event calendar for the Northeast region is also available on the MDC website.

Ask the Naturalist

Sometimes when you are exploring and discovering nature, you come across something that you just cannot come close to identifying. I experienced this recently when we were gathering supplies for Nature Craft Night.

Two rows of overlapping oval scales were firmly attached to the stem of one of the sweet gum seed balls we collected. They were hard and grey, and could not be removed without damage. In an attempt to remove a single scale, I broke one of the scales and discovered it was full of a bright yellow liquid.

Scale insects are unusual insects that can sometimes have no legs, antennae or other typical insect features. I thought this was the best explanation for these strange structures and set out to research what exactly I had found.

Websites and books had images and descriptions of a wide variety of scale insects, but none seemed to match my discovery. After giving up on more reliable sources, I turned to insect blogs and image searches.

In my searches, I came across the mention of insect eggs being mistaken for scale insects. Insects often have protective coverings or shells on their eggs. Was this why I was having such a hard time with my identification? I felt that I was really on the right track.

I was searching the scale insect section of a blog dedicated to identifying unfamiliar invertebrates when I decided to switch to the ega section. I found a picture that looked exactly like my gumball stem on the second page of posts. The title? "Katydid Eggs" These mystery scales that had me so stumped were the eggs of a common MIssouri insect. The blog even included a link to the Missouri Botanical Gardens website for verification.

Katydids are relatives of grasshoppers, but have much longer antennae. They feed on plant parts like leaves, stems and flowers. In the summer, many Missourians fall asleep listening to the sound of their singing.

Male katydids sing to attract a mate. The female katydid deposits her eggs in rows on a branch or stem of a plant. The eggs spend the winter on the plant and hatch during the next spring. I will be watching for katydid nymphs on my scaly stem in the coming months.

> - Amanda Moore Naturalist





Above: Katydid eggs on sweet gum stem

Left: Katydid on oak tree

Nature Shop

Visit the Northeast Regional Office to buy books and other nature-related items from the Nature Shop. The 2014 Natural Events Calendar is available while supplies last for only \$7. This calendar features breathtaking photos of Missouri wildlife and landscapes taken by employees of the Department.

During the months of January and February, two books will be on sale for 20% off at the Nature Shop. *Tried and True: Missouri Native Plants for Your Yard* can help you create a native wildflower garden in your own yard, while *Missouri Wildflowers* lets you identify wildflowers in any habitat.

You can also buy Nature Shop items online at www.mdcnaturshop.com.



Lanceleaf coreopsis, a native Missouri wildflower

Seedling Ordering

The George O. White State Nursery offers a wide variety of seedlings for purchase each year, from towering oaks to colorful sumacs. These seedlings can provide windbreaks, erosion control, habitat restoration or food and cover for wildlife on your property.

Extreme weather, including the severe drought during summer 2012 and heavy rainfall and flash flooding in spring 2013, has had an impact on the seedlings available. A few species will be limited in quantity, while some others will be smaller than typical.

Because of this, it is recommended that you order the seedlings you need as early as possible. Orders will only be accepted until April 15, 2014. Seedlings can be ordered by mail, fax, or on the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov/node/3328.

Seedlings are available in bundles of 10 or 25 and prices range from \$6 to \$32 per bundle, depending on species and quantity. Your trees can be shipped to you or you can pick them up at the nursery. If you would like them shipped, we can send them from February through May.

The Department offers a variety of publications and books that can help you choose the best plants for your location, the best time to plant, and care for your plantings over the years. Books are available at the Nature Shop, while publications can be found online or at your local MDC office.

Fragrant or aromatic sumac, one of the many seedlings available from the George O. White State Nursery.



All Missouri Department of Conservation Offices will be closed for the following holidays:

New Year's Day-January 1, 2014

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day-January 20, 2014

Lincoln's Birthday-February 12, 2014

President's Day-February 17, 2014



Clarksville Eagle Days

Saturday, January 25, 2014 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM Sunday, January 26, 2014 10:00 ÁM - 3:00 PM Clarksville, Missouri Lock and Dam 24

Visit Clarksville for winter viewing of bald eagles on the Mississippi River! Spotting scopes are available on the river and live eagle displays will take place throughout the event. There will also be activities for kids, so bring the whole family. All activities will take place at the Apple Shed or River Front Park. There will even be a bonfire to help take the chill off, but please remember to dress for the weather and bring your binoculars!

For more information, contact Karen Armstrong at 660-785-2420.



discover nature programs . . .

- · Help Missourians discover and explore nature
- · Provide expert instruction and hands-on activities
- Are available statewide



Places to Go

Union Ridge includes over 8000 acres in parts of three northeast Missouri counties - Adair, Putnam and Sullivan. Nearly every possible habitat type can be found at Union Ridge, as well as ample opportunity for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities.

MDC purchased the area in 1989. It is named for a ridge in the north part of the area that was called Union Ridge during the Civil War. There was also a Union Ridge post office in the late 1800s.

Spring Creek Ranch Natural Area is a 1769-acre section where prairie and savannah habitat is being restored through controlled burns. Native wildflowers and grasses are now flourishing.

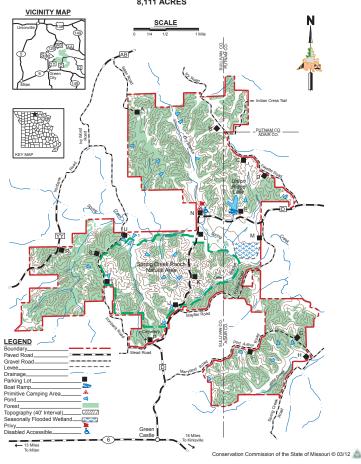
An 11-acre fishing lake is easily accessible from Route D. The lake includes a concrete boat ramp. Other ponds and streams provide more fishing opportunities at Union Ridge.

Camping at Union Ridge lets you fall asleep to the sounds of nature under a sky of endless stars. Although only primitive camping is available, there are privies at Dry Branch Camping Area.

Whether you prefer to walk through the woods, hunt for deer or other game, fish in a lake, sleep under the stars, or birdwatch in the savannah, Union Ridge is the place to go!

UNION RIDGE CONSERVATION AREA

ADAIR, PUTNAM, AND SULLIVAN COUNTIES





Missouri's State Tree

The flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida*, was named Missouri's state tree on June 20, 1955. Dogwoods are small trees that flower in the spring and bear fruit in the fall.

Although the dogwood puts on a show of white or pink in the spring, their flowers are actually small and greenish. The colors that catch our eye are produced by a group of four modified leaves called bracts that surround the flowers.

Historically, dogwood has been used to produce inks and dyes and even medicines. It has also been used to make a variety of items including golf club heads and cooking skewers.

Today, the dogwood is a popular landscaping tree. Not only does it provide color and shade, but can attract wildlife by providing shelter and a food source. Many Missouri animals include the fruit of the dogwood as part of their fall diet, including squirrels, white-tail deer, and wild turkey.